



## MUSIC AND THE POWER TO HEAL.

In the same year, 1876, that the world witnessed the first full production of *Der Ring des Nibelungen* at Bayreuth's new opera house, Lyttelton celebrated the opening of a new building, The Time Ball Station. From 1876 to 1934 the stone ball dropped from its tower signalling time to ships in the harbour. This enabled chronometers to be set and in turn ensured accurate navigation.

Significantly damaged by 4 September earthquake the Time Ball Station has been condemned after the 22 February aftershock, along with a number of the Garden City's heritage buildings. The face of the Christchurch that we all know has been disfigured and amongst the rubble a large number of people have lost their lives. Many of them will be known to members of the WSNZ. Thankfully it would seem that members of the WSNZ are all safe although they will have varying degrees of damage to their homes and workplaces. While they are still strong physically, the psychological effect of a trauma on such a massive scale will take some time to heal.

As in any grieving process it is important that emotions are released, particularly after the adrenalin that pumps through the body subsides. At this point one is left feeling flat, unfocused and sad. But, rather than reaching for prescription medication, get out your recording of *Parsifal*. You don't even have to listen to the whole opera, Act 3 will give you everything you need. One can almost guarantee that the sheer beauty of the music will trigger tears and help release all the pent-up emotion. More importantly the uplifting music of Redemption at the end of the opera will give new strength to carry on.



## THE PIANO MAN?

The above is a lovely picture painted through rose-coloured spectacles by Kurt von Roszinsky; Wagner is in full flight, playing his music for King Ludwig who is eavesdropping in the background shadow.

Alas, the historical truth of this is questionable, indeed highly improbable. Wagner gave up learning the piano at the age of twelve, and used it only when necessary – to help him discover other composers (notably Beethoven), to help him compose his own music, and finally to confront others with his music. (King Ludwig yes, a few times, but Wagner always preferred to get Hans von Bülow to do the King's honours at the piano.)

Heath's talk, *Lifting the Lid on Wagner's Piano*, to be given in Dunedin, Christchurch and Wellington, aims to expose the real truth about Wagner's attitude to the piano, and to reveal how important the instrument became in spreading Wagner's music throughout Europe and eventually throughout the world.

*How Much of a Fake is This?*

Some of the arrangements and references are mystical and heaven-storming. Others are highly irreverent, but very funny.

Heath's talk, which he toured with great success in Australia last year, divides into two parts: the first (major) part of the talk could have its own subtitle of *Wagner and the Piano*, while the second part will include widely different examples in a section that might be subtitled *Wagnerism and the Piano*.

Dates and venues for this event are as follows:

### Dunedin

**Saturday, 26 March 2.00pm**

Venue: Sale-Black House,  
Department of Music, The University  
of Otago

### Wellington

**Sunday 27 March 4.00pm**

Venue: St Andrew's on the Terrace

### Christchurch

**Friday 1 April 7.30pm**

Venue: Lecture Theatre A6, University  
of Canterbury

## STEPHEN PHILLIPS TO LEAVE STATE OPERA SA

The General Director of State Opera of South Australia, Stephen Phillips, will leave the company at the conclusion of his contract at the end of June. Stephen, who has been with SOSA for 22 years, 16 as General Director, will leave a wonderful legacy including two *Ring* Cycles. The first in 1998, the Strosser *Ring*, was marked for its minimal staging but fabulous music under the direction of Jeffrey Tate. The 2004 *Ring* was a triumph but unfortunately plagued by cost overruns. Despite calls for it to be revived funding has not been forthcoming and with storage costs running to \$400,000 a year it is sad but not surprising that the sets, costumes and props are to be sold. The sale will take place on Saturday 19 March with some items being sold on-line and others by auction.

Asked to name an object he personally would like as a keepsake, Stephen Phillips laughed slyly: "Well, don't call me Wotan but it would have to be the ring ... but without the curse."

The WSNZ thanks Stephen for his work, particularly Wagner performance, and we wish him all the very best in whatever role he takes up.

## WAGNER & LISZT

To commemorate the 200th anniversary of the birth of Franz Liszt Professor Terence Dennis presents a lecture recital focussing on the complex artistic and family relationships between Liszt and his son-in-law Wagner. This relationship between two of the titanic figures of the nineteenth century is one of the most fascinating and potent in all music. Terence will perform several of the Liszt transcriptions on Wagner, including those on the operas *Rienzi*, *Meistersinger* and *Parsifal*, and include such rarities as the Tausig Fantasy on the *Liebesnacht and Verklärung* (Love Scene and Transfiguration) from *Tristan und Isolde*; Carl Tausig was Liszt's most noted student and, by extension, well-acquainted in the Wagner Circle. Also to be shown on film is the historic performance of the formidable Liszt piano version of the *Tannhäuser-Overture and Bacchanale* played by Benno Moiseiwitsch. The programme will be completed with the stark and disturbing Liszt piano pieces associated with Wagner's death in Venice....

**Sunday, 1 May 2.00pm**

Venue: Marama Hall, University of Otago Dunedin



Clockwise from top left:- Gary Lehman, Stephen Gould, Ben Heppner and Stephen Phillips

## WSNZ MEMBERSHIP

Included with this newsletter is an application for 2011/12 membership of the Wagner Society of New Zealand. We have an exciting range of programmes across our four centres and we hope that you will want to renew your membership in order to enjoy these and the other activities that the Society organises.

We also hope that members will consider adding a donation to the Wagner New Zealand Foundation when they renew their membership. The Foundation supports the promotion of Wagner both within New Zealand and overseas and its work generally finds its way back to the Society via concerts, publications, presentations etc. For example, the concert performance of *Das Rheingold* by the Auckland Philharmonia Orchestra has largely been made possible thanks to a generous donation from the Foundation.

This year for the first time we are offering Internet Banking as a payment method for your membership fee. To ensure that we are able to match payments on our bank statement to the correct membership record we would ask that you take care in completing the references for the recipient of the payment (ourselves) as shown on your renewal form.

If you are paying by Internet Banking then it is only necessary to return the renewal form if you are making any changes to your membership details. Where no form is returned your electronic payment of your membership fee indicates your agreement to be bound by the rules of the Society.

## THE METROPOLITAN RING - LATEST!

In early February the Metropolitan Opera, New York announced that Ben Heppner has withdrawn from next season's performances of *Siegfried* and *Götterdämmerung*, the last two instalments of their new *Ring* cycle.

In an interview with the New York Times Heppner's manager, William Guerri, said that Mr. Heppner decided that the notoriously challenging role "was just not the right repertoire for him. He's the most famous Wagner tenor of our time ... but all Wagner roles weren't written for one voice." Heppner apparently found the role difficult and not gratifying.

Ben Heppner will be replaced by Gary Lehman who will sing the title role of Siegfried for most of next year's performances and Stephen Gould who will sing the remaining *Siegfried* performance. The two replacements will share the performances of Siegfried in *Götterdämmerung*.

Meanwhile the Independent reports that The Metropolitan Opera is joining the Hollywood bandwagon by planning to bring 3D to next season's production of *Siegfried*.

For the first time, 3D will be available on a live theatrical stage, with the singers appearing to move inside a three-dimensional world created by projections. The technique will not require opera fans to wear 3D glasses.

The technology, developed by Montreal-based company Réalisations, for director Robert Lepage, a Canadian stage and opera director, turns the scenery into digital effects projected onto the set. The team of digital artists and computer programmers who work with Cirque du Soleil have created lifelike imagery that can interact with performers on stage.

For example, a singer walking up a tilted stage could appear to be hiking up an imaginary 3D mountain or through a splashing waterfall.

For the Met's production, the effects will reportedly be limited to forest scenes in *Siegfried*.

## NEW MEMBERS

A big Wagnerian welcome to:  
William & Cheryl Hallam-Games .....  
..... Wellington

## STEPHEN FRY IN CHRISTCHURCH

The recent Christchurch earthquake caused the cancellation of the first meeting of the year for Garden City members. The programme, *Stephen Fry on Wagner*, has been rescheduled to Friday 30 September.

# WAGNER SOCIETY OF NEW ZEALAND

## 2011 PROGRAMME DETAILS

### Auckland

**Sunday, 17 April 5.30pm**

*Venue: Music Theatre, School of Music, University of Auckland, 6 Symonds St*

**Rienzi** - A complete screening of the new DVD from the recent Deutsche Oper Berlin production

**NB: This meeting will begin at 5.30pm**

**Sunday, 22 May 7.30pm**

*Venue: Music Theatre, School of Music, University of Auckland, 6 Symonds St*

**Annual General Meeting** - Wagner's Birthday celebrations

**Sunday, 17 July 7.30pm**

*Venue: Music Theatre, School of Music, University of Auckland, 6 Symonds St*

**An introduction to Das Rheingold**

In preparation for the APO performance. An evening that explores the prelude to the *Ring* cycle

**Friday 29 July 7.30pm**

*Venue: Auckland Town Hall*

**Das Rheingold** - concert performance given by the APO with Paul Whelan as Wotan

**Sunday, 4 September 7.30pm**

*Venue: Music Theatre, School of Music, University of Auckland, 6 Symonds St*

**A View From The Stage - Part 1**

WSNZ President Chris Brodrick looks at those who attended the first Bayreuth Festival in 1876

**Sunday, 4 December 7.30pm**

*Venue: Music Theatre, School of Music, University of Auckland, 6 Symonds St*

**Wagner Pot Pourri** - A Christmas celebration: An evening of requests, roundups, selections and surprises

### APO RHEINGOLD TICKETS

We still have a limited number of excellent seats available for the APO's concert performance of *Das Rheingold* on 29 July 2011 at the Auckland Town Hall. Our allocation of tickets is available until 29 April 2011 before any unsold tickets are returned to the APO for general sale. Enclosed with this newsletter is a booking form and we would ask that any members still wishing to buy tickets should return the form with their payment by 29 April 2011. Remember that these seats are at a discount to the standard single ticket price, plus those booking through the Society will receive a complimentary glass of wine during the interval.

If you have any queries about tickets please contact Michael Sinclair on 09-528-0776 or by email on: [info@wagnersociety.org](mailto:info@wagnersociety.org).

### Christchurch

**Friday 1 April 7.30pm**

*Venue: Lecture Theatre A6, University of Canterbury*

**Lifting the Lid on Wagner's Piano**

Heath Lees looks at Wagner's attitude to the instrument. Some send-ups of Wagner will be included & lots of illustrations.

**Friday 20 May 7.30pm**

*Venue: 101 Leinster Road, Merivale, Christchurch.*

Our annual **Pot Luck dinner** to

celebrate RW's birthday (May 22) at the home of Alastair & Susan Stokes

**Associated Events of Interest**

**Thursdays 16 & 23 June, 7.30**

*Venue: Lecture Theatre A6, University of Canterbury*

**John Pattinson lectures** on *Die Walküre*

in preparation for the Met. Opera production screening from Thursday 30 June until Friday 8 July, 2011. (NB. Enrol at Uni. Dept of Cont. Ed. for this course)

**Friday 29 July 7.30pm**

*Venue: Auckland Town Hall*

**Das Rheingold** - concert performance given by the APO with Paul Whelan as Wotan

**Friday 30 September 7.30pm**

*Venue: Lecture Theatre A6, University of Canterbury*

**Stephen Fry on Wagner:** Chris Brodrick introduces this 1-hour BBC programme

**Friday 28 October 7.30pm**

*Venue: Lecture Theatre A6, University of Canterbury*

**Wagner in Venice:** Chris Brodrick looks at the city that was Wagner's second home

**Sunday 27 November 6.00pm**

*Venue: 6 Parkinson Place, Ilam, Christchurch*

Christmas BBQ at the home of Audrey Harrison and Laurie Higgins

### Wellington

**Sunday 27 March 4.00pm**

*Venue: St Andrew's on the Terrace*

**Lifting the Lid on Wagner's Piano**

Heath Lees looks at Wagner's attitude to the instrument. Some send-ups of Wagner will be included & lots of illustrations.

**Sunday 12 June 11.00am**

*Venue: Adam Concert Room*

**Lohengrin** - DVD screening of the opera. (In association with NZ Opera Society.)

**Friday 29 July 7.30pm**

*Venue: Auckland Town Hall*

**Das Rheingold** - concert performance by the APO with Paul Whelan as Wotan

### Dunedin

**Saturday, 26 March 2.00pm**

*Venue: Sale-Black House, Department of Music, The University of Otago*

**Lifting the Lid on Wagner's Piano**

Heath Lees looks at Wagner's attitude to the instrument. Some send-ups of Wagner will be included & lots of illustrations

**Sunday, 1 May 2.00pm**

*Venue: Marama Hall, University of Otago*

**Liszt and Wagner: A Commemorative**

**Lecture Recital**

(For details see opposite)

**Sunday, 22 May 12.00 noon**

*Venue: Technique Training Restaurant, Otago Polytechnic, Harbour Terrace*

**Catered luncheon** to commemorate Wagner's birthday (1813) followed by the 1-hour BBC programme

**Stephen Fry on Wagner**

**Friday 29 July 7.30pm**

*Venue: Auckland Town Hall*

**Das Rheingold** - concert performance given by the APO with Paul Whelan as Wotan

**Sunday, 18 September 2.00pm**

*Venue: Sale-Black House, Department of Music, The University of Otago*

**A View From The Stage - Part 1**

WSNZ President Chris Brodrick looks at those who attended the first Bayreuth Festival in 1876

**Sunday, 6 November 2.00pm**

*Venue: Sale-Black House, Department of Music, The University of Otago*

**Wagner: The Early Operas 1**

Terence Dennis presents *Die Feen (The Fairies)* and *Das Liebesverbot (The Ban On Love)*

**Sunday, 4 December 1.00pm**

*Venue: Barclay Theatre, Otago Museum*

**Wagner - The Early Operas 2**

*Rienzi* plus our end-of-year Christmas celebration



*Michael Sinclair reports.*

The Auckland branch of the WSNZ was delighted to welcome popular New Zealand tenor, Simon O'Neill, to its meeting on 20 February 2011. Simon was taking a well earned rest in New Zealand having just appeared as Siegmund in a new production of *Die Walküre* at La Scala, a production that he will also sing in at the Staatsoper unter den Linden, Berlin in April.

The meeting opened with a brief audio and visual introduction made up of images of Simon throughout his career, accompanied by 'In fernem Land' from his Wagner CD *Fathers and Sons*. Simon then took the floor and treated members to over 90 minutes of anecdotes, memories and interesting and often amusing stories about his career. He even managed a few musical moments, despite suffering from allergies on the day.

Discussion started around his early career detailing the path from Ashburton, his home town, to the USA where he received much of his musical education. He eventually descended on New York, feeling that if you wanted to be in opera this is where you needed to be, ultimately leading to a contract at the Metropolitan Opera where he spent a number of years understudying Plácido Domingo. While the Met worked him hard during this period, Domingo never once cancelled, but the experience was to hold him in good stead and finally gave him the break he was looking for.

This break turned out to be the chance to sing Siegmund at Covent Garden during the first complete run of their *Ring* cycle in 2007. Domingo had initially been scheduled to sing in all three cycles, but had to withdraw from the first, leaving Simon with the golden opportunity he was looking for. He grasped it by the horns giving a performance that took the house by storm, with everyone wanting to know who Simon O'Neill was. Looking back on it Simon agreed that this was a turning point and was to lead to many offers of work around the world.

Around this time Bayreuth first started courting him. Simon made his Bayreuth debut last year when he stood in for an indisposed Jonas Kaufmann in *Lohengrin*, and will sing Parsifal at this year's festival, but his road to the Holy Grail of Wagner was not a straightforward one. His first audition there was memorable for all the wrong reasons when he was asked to sing an excerpt from *Lohengrin* which he had never sung and for which he did not have the music. But he was not to slip out of it that easily as Gudrun Wagner told him, "but this is Bayreuth, we have the original signed manuscript available." After a couple of false starts he was finally asked to sing Parsifal in Stefan Herheim's

## SIMON O'NEILL – AUCKLAND – 20 FEBRUARY 2011



Simon in La Scala *Die Walküre* –  
Photo Brescia e Amisano / Teatro alla Scala.



acclaimed production at this year's festival, although as yet he has no other plans to sing there.

After a short break, members watched an excerpt from Simon's performance as Siegmund at La Scala, which had been recorded at the gala opening night on 7 December 2010 and beamed live to cinemas around the world. His Sieglinde that evening was Waltraud Meier and discussion then turned to how the on stage chemistry varied depending on who he was singing with. Simon was keen to compare his Sieglinde on the merits of the kiss that the lovers share at the end of Act I, and conceded that Waltraud Meier was rather good in this respect!

Siegmund will continue to play an important part in Simon's repertoire over the coming years, with performances lined up in Berlin, London, Milan, New York, Munich and Hamburg. Other Wagner ventures will include *Parsifal* in Vienna and New York, in addition to Bayreuth, and Walter in *Die Meistersinger* in London. He sees Tristan in the distance, but is conscious that he is still young and needs to pace these roles

throughout his career.

But Simon will not be exclusively devoting his performances to Wagner. He sang Max in *Der Freischütz* in Vienna last year, and will sing it again with the London Symphony Orchestra, and has plans for Samson, Florestan, Cavaradossi and Mao over the coming years. Another role that may well become a signature one is Otello, which he is scheduled to sing in Houston in 2014.

Simon was originally scheduled to sing Otello at the Salzburg Festival in 2008 under Riccardo Muti, but withdrew feeling that it was simply too early to be attempting Verdi's tragic Moor. The role lay forgotten until he was asked to sing it with little more than 24 hours notice at a concert performance by the London Symphony Orchestra under the baton of Sir Colin Davis in 2009. With little time for preparation and conceding that he did not know the role fully and would have to sight read, Simon went on to give a blazing performance that had everyone on the edge of their seats and elicited comments that he was the best Otello since Domingo. No small praise for someone who had spent years understudying the great Spanish tenor.

As for performances in New Zealand Simon will be singing with the NZSO in all the main centres in September this year in Beethoven's *9th Symphony*. There are also hopes that he will be able to come back to New Zealand to sing Wagner in the not too distant future, but admitted that he would have to kill the entire audience if he said any more!

Simon says that he has always liked to keep his career "under the radar." However the buzz that now surrounds New Zealand's favourite tenor is such that he is most definitely on the A-list of heldentenors and is sure to be wooing audiences around the world for many years to come. He certainly wooed this audience!